



Aftermath by LizzySong

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Summary: As soon as he pulled into the driveway, he could feel all the energy drain from his body, leaving him with a pounding headache, unable to focus properly on anything he was doing. (The kids, with a little help, take care of Steve after the tunnels and his fight with Billy)

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note: I got a request on my tumblr to write a fic centered around Steve recovering from the aftermath of his fight with Billy -- so here it is! The first chapter is pretty short, but I promise the next one will be longer!

Enjoy!

It had been a rough night to say the least.

From demodogs, to Billy, to Max's driving, and then back to demodogs again, Steve was absolutely exhausted -- more exhausted, he was sure, than he'd ever been before.

He'd done everything he could to protect these kids -- and he'd succeeded, thank god -- but now he was paying the price.

The adrenaline that had been coursing through his body for the past few hours had worn off once he'd gotten the kids back to the Byers' house safely. As soon as he pulled into the driveway, he could feel all the energy drain from his body, leaving him with a pounding headache, unable to focus properly on anything he was doing.

Max, who had been sitting in the passenger seat, noticed this, and helped him get out of the car, the others immediately following suit -- even Mike who still seemed a little hesitant of Steve.

They got their guardian-for-the-night into the house and sat him on the couch, Dustin sitting next to him with a concerned hand on the teen's shoulder.

Max and Lucas sat on the other side of Steve, and Mike went to the kitchen to get an ice pack, which was followed quickly by a shout of "What the hell?!"

Steve tried to stand up when he heard the yell, but was immediately -- and far too easily -- pushed back down by the kids. "It's just the dead demodog," Dustin told him. "Oh shit..." Steve muttered, having forgotten about the demodog in the fridge.

"Be cool, Mike!" Dustin yelled in the direction of the kitchen. Mike returned to the living room a minute later holding an ice pack, which he handed to Steve. Then he turned to Dustin, "What the hell is that *thing* doing in there?!"

"It's a scientific discovery, Mike! We need to preserve it!"

"It's a *Demogorgon*, Dustin!"

"Demodog!"

"Oh my god... Shut up, both of you," Steve interjected with a groan. He was holding the ice pack Mike had given him to his head, but it was providing little relief from his pounding headache, as well as what felt like the beginnings of nausea.

The two boys stopped arguing to look at him with some concern. He looked bad -- really bad. They hadn't noticed how bad it really was earlier in all the excitement, but now that they got a good look at Steve's face, they saw how bruised and swollen it was.

"...We should get you to a hospital," Lucas said. He'd been watching Steve quietly for the past few minutes and noticed how out-of-it he was. It wasn't surprising that the teenager was in such bad shape -- Billy had beat the shit out of him -- but now he seemed to be getting worse. Maybe they'd pushed him too far.

"No!" Steve and Mike said in unison to Lucas's comment. "What?!" Max, Lucas, and Dustin yelled, making Steve wince at the noise.

"We can't take him to a hospital," said Mike, "What if they ask us questions about what happened?"

"Then we tell them that he got beat up -- we don't need to tell them about the Upside Down," said Lucas with a tone of irritation.

"No," Steve said, "Wheeler's right. With all this weird-ass government... and.. *alien*... shit going on, somebody's gonna figure out the rest of what happened. No hospital."

Max sighed, both concern and annoyance clear in her expression. "Well what do youwanna do, then?" she asked, looking at the teen

sitting next to her.

"...We're just gonna wait here for the others to come back," Steve said. He felt like he couldn't think anymore. The kids wanted him to be in charge and come up with some sort of plan, some sort of solution, and he just didn't know what to tell them, or what to do. He was just so tired...

"Steve!" the kids all yelled in unison, and he jumped a little, opening his eyes.

"You can't go to sleep right now, man," Lucas said, remembering the time Eleven had knocked him out using her powers. He'd told his father he'd been knocked out -- leaving out the part about Eleven being basically magical -- and Mr. Sinclair had told him not to sleep for a while afterwards.

Steve nodded a little, wincing at the pain this action caused him. "I know... I know..." he said with a sigh. This wasn't his first head injury -- though he thought it might be his worst -- and he knew that Lucas was right. ...But god damnit was he tired...

He continued wavering in and out of consciousness for the next half-an-hour, the kids doing their best to keep him awake and aware of his surroundings. Near the end of this thirty minutes, the group saw a pair of headlights shining through the window.

2. Chapter 2

The door opened to reveal Hopper, who was supporting an exhausted Eleven. She had her arms wrapped loosely around the man's waist, as she leaned her weight into him, and he had an arm around her shoulders as he guided her into the living room.

Mike stood up and quickly walked over to them looking worried, and El gave him a weak smile. "I closed it..." she said softly, and Mike smiled back at her, tears coming to his eyes, "I know you did."

He hugged her gently, and she weakly wrapped her arms around his neck, now leaning her weight into him instead of Hopper.

It was at this point that Hopper noticed the others sitting on the couch. They'd been watching the scene unfold -- Max with a somewhat irritated expression, Dustin and Lucas smiling, and Steve who was still a little confused about who exactly the girl was.

Jim noticed how horribly bruised and swollen the teenager's face was, and he furrowed his brow with a combination of concern and confusion. "What the hell happened to you?" he asked, walking over to the four sitting on the couch.

"It was my fault," Max said, and she looked like she might cry. "No it wasn't!" Lucas said, looking at her. Then he looked at Hopper, "It was her stepbrother. He was attacking me and Steve stopped him. But..." he trailed off, looking at Steve.

Hopper nodded and knelt down in front of the teen. The kid looked bad -- really bad -- and there was no question in Jim's mind that Steve had a concussion. The only question was how bad it was.

"You get knocked out?" he asked. The teenager stared at him for a few seconds in tired, dazed confusion before answering. "Uh... Yeah..." Steve said quietly, and Hopper nodded a little. "Okay," the policeman said, "For how long?"

"I... I don't..." Steve said, with growing anxiety as he realized he didn't know the answer to Hopper's question.

"Hey, hey, it's okay kid," Jim said, trying to calm the boy down.

"It was ten minutes," Dustin said.

"What?" asked Hopper.

"He was unconscious for ten minutes."

Steve gave Dustin a small, grateful smile, and Hopper nodded again. "Okay, that's not good, but I've seen worse," the man said, "You shouldn't sleep for a while tonight."

The teenager sighed exasperatedly, "I know, I know..." Steve knew Hopper was right, just as he'd known that Lucas was right when he'd said the same thing only thirty minutes earlier, but he was starting to get annoyed.

He didn't like feeling like he wasn't in control of himself, and with his mind in a dazed fog, and these people telling him what he should and shouldn't be doing, he certainly didn't feel like he was in control of himself. ...Or maybe he just wasn't used to people caring this much about him.

"...I'm gonna get some water," Steve said after a minute of sitting in silence, hoping to get a few moments to himself in the kitchen. The worried looks the kids were giving him were starting to make him a little uncomfortable. Even the punk girl he'd just met -- what was her name? Eleven? -- was staring at him with concern; and *she* looked like she might pass out any second.

The eighteen-year-old started to stand up, but was quickly forced back down by Hopper. "You're not gonna be able to make it in there by yourself, kid," the man said. His voice wasn't as gruff as it usually was and he even seemed a little worried about the boy.

"I'll get you some water," Max said, standing up from her place on the sofa. "No, Max, you don't have to..." Steve said to her, but she gave him a pointed look and he nodded slightly, realizing that she needed a minute away from the others.

Max grabbed Lucas's hand and pulled him into the kitchen with her, leaving Steve, Dustin, Hopper, Mike, and Eleven in the living room.

Hopper stood up with a grunt, and noticed that El was still standing with her arms around Mike, who was clearly beginning to have trouble supporting the girl's weight. Eleven was also looking more and more tired by the minute, and Hopper sighed. "You need to rest," he said to El, who nodded slightly. "Couch..." she said softly to Mike, who helped her to the sofa.

She sat down next to Steve and bent forward, resting her head in her hands, feeling a dull throbbing beginning in her temples. She'd never used her powers to this extent before, and she wondered how long it was going to take to get her normal energy back.

She felt a gentle hand on her back and looked to her side and saw the teenager looking down at her with concern in his eyes. "Here," he said, handing her the ice pack he'd been holding to his head, "It'll help." El gave him a small smile and took it, holding it to her own head.

Mike sat down on the other side of her. She laid her head on his shoulder, and he wrapped his arms gently around her. "You're okay," he whispered, "Everything's okay now."

"...You want more ice?" Dustin asked looking at Steve. He was still worried about the teen, and he felt a little guilty. Dustin was, after all, the one who'd insisted they bring Steve to the tunnels with them. He should've made them drop their guardian-for-the-night off at the hospital instead. He'd known the teenager was in bad shape, but he made him come along anyway and protect them.

Steve shook his head slightly, "I'm okay. It wasn't really helping anyway." Dustin nodded a little, still looking at his new friend, who had quickly become a sort of big brother to him, with concern.

"Hey," Steve said, noticing this, "I'll be fine. Really. You think this is the first beating I've taken?" He gave the kid a reassuring smile, and it seemed to work -- at least a little.

Steve was thankful that the kid was reassured, because he wasn't sure he could keep acting like he was okay. This felt like the worst hangover and the worst flu he'd ever had combined, with his whole face bruised and swollen just to add to the misery. --And the worst

part was the fact that he couldn't just sleep it off, because if he went to sleep, he might not wake up. ...But as far as he was going to let Dustin -- or any of the kids -- know, he was fine.

Max came back into the room, Lucas following close behind her, with a glass of water which she handed to Steve with a quiet "Here."

"Thanks," he said, taking the glass and taking a sip of water.

The group was quiet for a few minutes, Hopper switching his gaze between Eleven and Steve worriedly. El didn't notice this, too focused on Mike and too close to sleep, but Steve saw the surrogate father's gaze, and met it. He tried to give the man a look that said "Don't worry about me," but the policeman wasn't easily convinced. He'd experienced similar injuries when he was Steve's age, so he knew exactly what the boy was feeling; he also knew that he didn't want to show weakness in front of the kids.

Hopper nodded slightly in response to Steve's expression, but he gave the kid a look that clearly stated that he wasn't buying the kid's "I'm fine" act.

Soon another pair of headlights came shining through the windows, and the group all knew that they

belonged to Joyce, Will, Jonathan, and Nancy.

3. Chapter 3

Joyce and Will entered first, Joyce holding Will close to her side and supporting his weight, much the same way that Hopper and El had entered the home.

Joyce quickly lead her youngest son to the sofa, and Dustin stood up to allow Will to sit down. He was exhausted, but he was smiling, knowing he could finally get his life back now that that thing was out of him.

Steve looked down at the newcomer. He didn't look good -- his hair plastered to his face with sweat and dark circles under his eyes -- but then, Steve wasn't really in a position to judge anyone else's condition right now. "Welcome to the infirmary, kid," he said with a small smile.

Will looked up at him and smiled back. It was at this point that both he and Joyce noticed how bad Steve looked, and their eyes widened.

"What happened?" Joyce asked the teen with concern.

"It's nothing, I'll be fine," Steve said a little too quickly, making the mother sigh. She patted his leg lightly before standing up and grabbing Hopper's arm, pulling him into the kitchen, evidently to talk about what was to be done with the injured teenager sitting on her couch.

While Joyce and Hopper were in the kitchen, Nancy and Jonathan walked into the room, holding hands. They looked tired, and their hair was plastered to their faces with sweat, but mostly they looked relieved. ...At least until Nancy noticed Steve. She was kneeling in front of him in a second, dragging Jonathan with her.

Steve sighed. Nancy was the third person to kneel in front of him worriedly tonight, and she was one of the last people he wanted to see right now.

He didn't blame her for choosing Jonathan over himself, but it still hurt, especially when he had to see the two of them together right in

front of him.

"Steve, what happened?" Nancy asked, looking up at the boy, worry clear in her eyes.

"He protected us. ...But he got the shit beat out of him," Dustin answered before Steve got the chance to say a word, and Steve gave him a small smile of gratitude.

"Protected them from what?" Nancy asked, still staring at Steve.

"Nance," Steve said with a slight edge to his voice, "Don't worry about it. The kids are safe and I'll be fine." He didn't mean to sound so irritated with her, but in his current condition he was finding it difficult to hide his emotions from her. She'd hurt him, and even though it really wasn't her fault -- people fall out of love all the time -- he couldn't help but be annoyed with her right now.

"...I should get going," he said, starting to stand up, "Any of you shitheads want a ride home?" he addressed the kids now. But before they could answer, Steve felt his head swim as he tried to take a step forward and then felt himself collapsing. He only missed the floor thanks to Nancy and Jonathan catching him, each of them grabbing one of his arms and helping him stand back up and then sitting him back on the couch.

"That's it," Nancy said, anxiety clear in her voice, "I'm taking you to the hospital."

Steve sighed, ignoring the worried looks from everyone around him -- especially Dustin and Max, knowing he was scaring them and not wanting to have to admit that he wasn't okay to them. "Nance, you don't have to do that," he said, "I'll be fine."

"No," it was Jonathan who spoke now, surprising everyone, "You're in really bad shape, Steve. You need to be seen by a doctor. Now."

Jonathan wasn't particularly fond of Steve, it was true, but the guy was clearly injured and needed help. Help that he didn't want to accept.

"They're right, kid," said Hopper from the doorway of the kitchen,

"You need to go to the hospital." He had been about to come into the room and tell Steve the same thing, but Nancy and Jonathan had beaten him to it.

"Come on," Nancy said, taking Steve's arm and carefully helping him up, "Let's go."

He let her carefully guide him across the room, too tired to continue arguing with the group.

"Wait!" a voice called when they reached the front door, and they turned around to see who it was. It had been Dustin, who was standing up and walking over to them, "I'm coming, too."

Then Max and Lucas both stood and made their way to front door as well. "Us too," they said in unison, making Steve smile a little. Nancy gave the three of them a reprimanding look, "No. You guys need to get some sleep -- we might be at the hospital all night."

"Nance," Steve said, "they're coming." He didn't really want to be alone with Nancy right now, afraid that in his current state he might be a little too honest with her about his feelings. He needed a buffer; and besides, those kids were persistent as hell. If they wanted to come, they were going to come, no matter what he or Nancy said.

Nancy sighed. "Fine," she said, helping Steve out the door, Max, Lucas, and Dustin following close behind them. She didn't want to waste time arguing with the kids. She looked back at Jonathan, who was now sitting on the couch next to Will with an arm around his little brother, as she left, giving him a somewhat exasperated look, which made him smile slightly in amusement.

4. Chapter 4

The ride to the hospital was... awkward. Nancy and Steve didn't say a word to each other the whole time, and the kids only occasionally whispered to each other, all crowded in the backseat together.

Steve heard them say something about Billy and how he "must've woken up and tried to walk home," and how Max was "super badass."

He didn't really understand what any of that meant, and made a mental note to ask them about it later.

Finally they pulled into the parking lot of the ER wing of the hospital, Nancy getting out of the car first and then helping Steve to the entrance of the hospital, the kids following close behind them.

They went up to the reception desk and the receptionist looked up, gasping when she saw Steve's face. "Oh my god!" she exclaimed, "What happened to you?"

"He got in a fight!" Dustin said in irritation, "And he needs help. So call whoever you need to to make that happen -- fast!"

Nancy and Steve exchanged a glance, then looked at Dustin in surprise. They weren't sure they'd ever seen the kid have this sort of outburst before -- that was more Mike's thing. Even Lucas and Max were looking at him, their eyes wide with surprise.

"...What?" Dustin asked the group, confused by their reactions. The receptionist smiled a little at the boy. "Don't worry, Sweetheart," she said, "We'll take good care of your brother. You can take a seat, and I'll get you some ice for that head of yours." She turned to Steve when she said this, giving him a sympathetic smile.

The group had to wait a long time before anyone called for Steve -- far too long for a small hospital just outside of Hawkins, and they couldn't help but wonder if it could be related to the lab practically being a post-apocalyptic war zone, though they weren't sure how this could be the case.

Max and Lucas had fallen asleep, leaning into each other a little in their uncomfortable waiting room chairs.

Dustin hadn't even considered sleeping, the adrenaline caused by the night's events still coursing through his body too strongly for him to relax enough. He was sitting across from Steve, and he hadn't taken his eyes off the teenager since they'd sat down. This had made Steve a little uncomfortable at first, but when he realized the kid wasn't going to stop, he just accepted it.

Nancy was sitting next to Steve, who she kept nudging every fifteen minutes or so to make sure he hadn't fallen asleep -- which he had a couple of times -- even though she wouldn't look at him. She felt guilty for his injuries, thinking that if she'd stayed behind to watch Mike like she'd originally planned on, maybe this wouldn't have happened. She just wanted to get this over with and go back to the Byers' home and go to sleep.

It was late, and she felt awkward; she and Steve hadn't really talked about what happened, leaving a lot about what their current relationship was up in the air, which she hated. Nancy liked things to be clear and nothing about the last year had been like that, she was in a constant state of anxiety, and now, sitting next to her ex-boyfriend at the hospital because he got hurt protecting her brother and his friends from something that they all had refused to tell her about? It was just too much.

Thankfully a nurse walked into the waiting room and called out, "Harrington?" Startling Nancy out of her train of thought.

The group all stood up, Dustin waking Lucas and Max up, and walked over to the nurse, Steve leaning heavily on Nancy's shoulder to try and keep himself balanced.

"...You sure you want all of them to come back with you?" the nurse asked Steve, who smiled a little. "Trust me," he said, "You don't want to leave these three unsupervised for more than a few minutes." This earned tired smiles from the three children, especially Dustin.

The nurse just nodded and lead the five of them to an exam room. She took Steve's vitals and asked him a few questions about his

injury, the answers to which she wrote down on a clipboard, and then left them to their own devices.

There were only two visitor chairs in the room set right across from the bed. Nancy took one of these chairs, Dustin sat next to Steve on the bed, and Lucas and Max sat on the floor, making Steve frown at them.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you not to sit on a hospital floor? Do you have any idea what could be down there? Come up here," Steve said sternly, patting the empty spot next to him on the bed.

"Aren't you supposed to like, be able to lay down, though?" Max asked, seeing that if she and Lucas squeezed onto the bed, there'd be no room for Steve to rest.

The teenager shrugged, "If I lay down I'm gonna fall asleep anyway." Max and Lucas looked at each other and shrugged, then stood up and joined Steve and Dustin on the bed.

Nancy smiled as she watched the scene unfold, seeing how much Steve really cared about those kids -- and the fact that he was acting like a father amused her.

It was another long wait before anyone came to look at Steve, and the kids soon fell asleep, leaning on Steve as he was in the middle of the group. He smiled and wrapped his arms around the children in a protective, brotherly embrace.

Nancy bit her lip and looked up at her ex-boyfriend. "Steve..." she started, and the boy sighed, "Nance, you don't have to--"

--I shouldn't've led you on. I was confused and scared and... I should've handled it better. I'm sorry."

"Nancy, it's okay. I don't blame you, I'm not mad. ...And I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't have left you alone at that party like that."

"You were hurt. --And you still made sure I got home."

"But still... *I* should've been the one to take you home."

"...I guess we both screwed up."

"Guess so. ...Call it even?"

Nancy smiled and nodded, "Yeah."

5. Chapter 5

Author's Note: Here is the final chapter! Thank you so much for all of the favourites and follows, and the super supportive reviews! You're all awesome, and I'm so happy you've enjoyed this story!

(And to the request I recieved about adding a scene where Steve's dad comes and the kids and Joyce and Hopper defend Steve: I loved it, but I wasn't sure how to add it into this story. I will definitely write a one-shot of that in the future though!)

Until the next fic!

-LizzySong

It was one-thirty in the morning by the time they were able to leave the hospital, all of them exhausted, and Steve... slightly irritated.

"Well that was a waste of time," he said as the group walked through the parking lot to the car. Nancy had insisted he lean on her for support again, even though he was feeling more stable than he had earlier that night.

"No it wasn't," Nancy said, a little sternly.

"Nance, she gave me an ice pack and told me to sleep -- but not *too* much. And to not do anything for a week. I could've told you that."

"Well, at least we know your okay. Otherwise we all would've been worried. I mean, you *did* collapse. That's usually not a good thing. Now we know we just have to wake you up every couple hours."

"Yeah," said Lucas, "If we didn't know you were okay, we wouldn't've let you sleep at *all*."

Max and Dustin both nodded in agreement, and Nancy smiled at the three kids. They all seemed to really look up to and care about Steve, and she couldn't help but be surprised -- and a little amused -- by the fact that *King Steve* had become a big brother to all these kids overnight.

The drive back to the Byers' home was long and quiet, the kids having fallen asleep in the backseat almost immediately, and Steve dozing in the passenger seat next to Nancy, who smiled a little. She was relieved that she and Steve had reconciled and that there wouldn't be any bad blood between them.

Finally Nancy pulled into the Byers' driveway and parked the car. She woke the kids and Steve up helping the latter to the door despite his tired and weak protests of "Nance, I can walk."

Steve immediately crashed on the couch, not even bothering to take his jacket or shoes off, and fell asleep almost the second he laid down.

Mike and El were already asleep on the floor in sleeping-bags, and they were holding hands, as if afraid that they'd be separated again while they slept.

Lucas and Max found some blankets and pillows, quickly joining them. They talked for a few minutes before drifting into sleep themselves.

Dustin stayed up a little later, keeping an eye on Steve. He was still worried about his friend... mentor... brother...? Despite what the doctor had told them.

And Nancy went to the kitchen where she found Joyce and Hopper sitting at the table, talking quietly.

"Oh," Nancy said, a little surprised -- she'd expected Hopper and Jonathan to be there, not Joyce -- "Where's...?"

Joyce gave the girl a small, tired smile. "Jonathan's sleeping in Will's room tonight," she said.

Nancy nodded a little. Of course Jonathan had insisted Joyce try to relax for the rest of the night -- she'd been through hell and back the last couple days.

"Here," Joyce said gently, patting the empty chair next to her, "Sit down, sweetheart."

Nancy smiled a little and obliged, taking the seat she'd been offered. "How's your friend?" Joyce asked with concern, "He didn't look good."

"It's pretty bad... but not as bad as we thought it was," Nancy said with a small sigh, "He'll be okay."

Hopper and Joyce both nodded in response, looking relieved.

The three of them sat in the kitchen for a long while, talking about their plans for dealing with the inevitable aftermath of the past week's events. Nancy also told them about what she and Jonathan had done to help insure closure for Barb's parents -- as well as close the lab -- which made Joyce beam with pride.

Eventually Joyce joined Jonathan and Will in the younger son's room, and Hopper went to the living room and found a chair to sleep in for the night as he watched over the children.

Nancy on the other hand stayed in the kitchen. She didn't think she'd be able to sleep even if she tried, so she decided to forgo it all together. Besides, someone needed to keep an eye on Steve.

He might not be as bad off as she'd originally thought, but he was still in bad shape, and she had to make sure he was alright.

By the time Steve woke up the next morning, most of the kids were gone. Nancy had taken Mike home, dropping Dustin off at his house on the way, and Max and Lucas had gone to Lucas' home. This left Eleven -- who was sitting on the floor... staring at him? -- and Will, who was in his room with Jonathan and Joyce.

El noticed that Steve was waking up and stood up, walking to the kitchen. She came back a minute later dragging Hopper behind her.

The teenager slowly sat up, gingerly pressing a hand against his head, a dull throbbing making its presence known.

"Hey, kid," Hopper said, sitting down next to Steve on the couch, his voice a little gentler than normal, "How're you feelin'?"

The boy shrugged a little, "I've been better..."

The policeman nodded, giving the kid a slight smile, "You want some ice?"

The teen shook his head, wincing as it caused the throbbing in his head to worsen, "No... I'll be fine."

Steve started to stand up, but was forced to sit back down when his head swam too much for him to see straight, much less walk. ...Maybe he wasn't in as okay of shape as he thought.

"Hey," Hopper said, steadying the boy as he sat, or more accurately, fell, back on the couch, "You're not going anywhere today."

"But Mrs. Byers--"

--Will kill me if I let you leave when you can't stand for more than a second."

Steve looked at the man sitting next to him, a little confusion present in his eyes. He wasn't used to adults caring about him.

Jim gave the teenager a somewhat amused smile and clapped a hand on the his shoulder, "I think she's gonna try to adopt you."

The police chief's words made Steve smile a little...and blush slightly, though thankfully, with the majority of his face being badly bruised, this wasn't noticeable.

After several more minutes of talking and subtly examining Steve's condition, Hopper stood up and declared that he was going to get Joyce, as she'd made him promise to get her when the teenager woke up, adding at the end, "She's going to want to mother you, so just... be ready for that." Steve laughed slightly and smiled, "Okay."

The policeman returned a couple minutes later with Joyce. El was now sitting next to the teen on the sofa, happily chatting away. This surprised Hopper, as the girl usually didn't talk much. Apparently she'd taken a liking to Steve...All the kids had.

Joyce was immediately at the boy's side, asking him a myriad of rapid-fire questions, leaving no time in between for him to answer any of them.

By the end of this she had Steve in a tight hug -- a little too tight for comfort, but he didn't try to stop her, enjoying the feeling of being cared for enough that someone was hugging him that tightly.

"You're staying here until I'm sure you can take care of yourself, you hear me?" she said as she finally pulled away from the hug. Steve smiled a little and nodded, once again wincing at the pain this caused in his head.

Joyce frowned in concern at the boy's wince of pain and stood up. "I'm going to get you some medicine for that," she told him as she walked to the kitchen.

Steve leaned back into the sofa, exhaling quietly, relieved that the events of last night were over. He felt Eleven lean into him a little, hugging his arm and resting her head on his shoulder, and smiled. She'd told him all about what she had to do last night, and though he didn't fully understand it, he knew she was just as exhausted as he was -- maybe more -- and he was happy that she trusted him enough to fall asleep next to him like this, considering he'd only just met her.

...Of course, he didn't know that Mike had told her everything that Steve had done to protect Mike and the others. He thought that kid hated him.

Finally, after eighteen years of life, he felt like he had a family. ..And all it took was babysitting a bunch of reckless thirteen-year-olds and having the shit beat out of him. As far as he was concerned, it was well worth the pain he'd be in for the next couple weeks.